

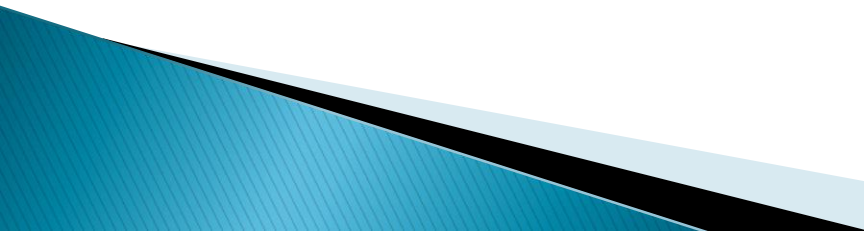
# How Mental Health Issues Manifest throughout the Abuse and Neglect Case Process

NM Family Advocacy Program ECHO Session #7

Susan K Burns LCSW 6/25/19



# NM FAP

- ▶ (Slides 2, 3 and 9 are included from presentation on 4/30/19 for purposes of integration of material continuity)
  - ▶ The New Mexico Family Advocacy Program is tasked with the vital role of assisting parents involved in the Child Protective Service system. To do this requires a difficult balance of support and challenge to the life choices of these parents.
  - ▶ Many of the families involved in NMFAP have experienced current and generational psychosocial and mental health complications in making healthy or successful choices. To create stronger family systems and healthier children, we must understand the often life-long challenges parents may face that complicate or at times sabotage their own desire for success.
- 

# Long term challenges for clients

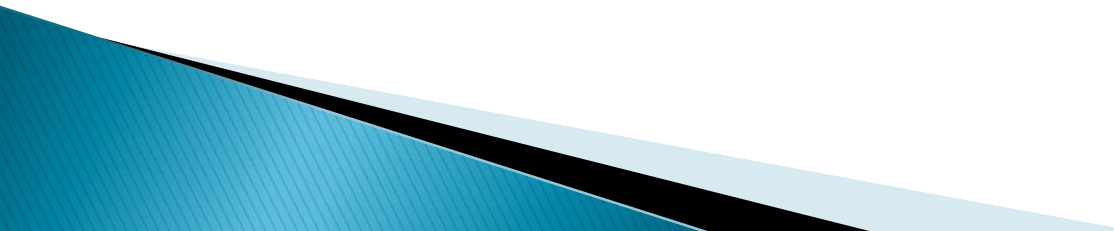
## ▶ Developmental delays

- Disorders across the life span: intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum, attention-deficit disorders, schizophrenia spectrum

## ▶ Mental Health realities

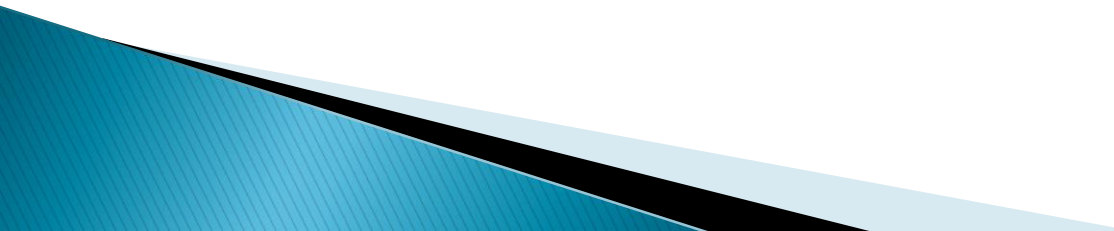
- Chronic conditions vs adjustment disorder

## ▶ Psychosocial concerns

- Poverty
  - Homelessness
  - Little if any family support
- 

## Effects and consequences of dysregulating mental health and addiction concerns on client's cognitive processing, personal interactions and presentation of self

### Goals of presentation:

1. Recognize that difficult to manage behaviors seen in some of our clients can require us as professionals to pull from our own “emotional regulation” skills to respond successfully.
  2. Our clients, as do all people, rely on defense mechanisms to protect themselves from perceived, though usually unconscious psychological harm. Our goal as an advocacy team is not to strip clients of their unsuccessful tools but increase and replace their “protections” with tools they can use with more success.
- 

Multiple cause for and multiple presentations of, repeated, patterned, embedded response to any stress.

Chronic inability to use self-control over internal chaos/pressures whether due to internal (psychological, developmental, mental health, addiction) or external (social, environmental) causes may appear to providers as emotionally over or under –reactive, aggressive or confusing behaviors.

This behavior may be a symptom of

- connected mental illness such as anxiety or depression or thought disorder. It may also be directly related to attention deficit disorder, borderline disorder or post-traumatic disorder.

Or reactions to feelings of

- SHAME ( vulnerable, weak )
- HOPELESSNESS
- HELPLESSNESS

or

- PERSONALITY DISORDERS OR TRAITS
- 

# Emotional dysregulation

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional\\_dysregulation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_dysregulation)

Possible manifestations of emotional dysregulation can be associated with externalizing behaviors including:

- showing more extreme emotions than expected in a given situation.
- difficulty recognizing their own emotional cues and reactions
- focusing on only negative aspects of an situation.
- becoming avoidant or aggressive when dealing with negative emotions such as destroying or throwing objects, aggression towards self or other, verbal outbursts and threats
- difficulty focusing their attention
- being impulsive
- difficulty calming after an upset

**These reactions can show occur in seconds to minutes or hours after a precipitating event.**



## **Emotional dysregulation can be associated with an experience of:**

- early psychological trauma,
- brain injury
- chronic maltreatment (such as child abuse, child neglect, or institutional neglect/abuse)

## **Psychiatric disorders such as:**

- Severe anxiety or depression
- reactive attachment disorders
- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- autism spectrum disorders
- bipolar disorder
- borderline personality disorder
- complex post-traumatic stress disorder, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders

In such cases as borderline personality disorder and complex post-traumatic stress disorder, hypersensitivity to emotional stimuli causes a slower return to a normal emotional state. (Cites from Wikipedia source).

Brewin CR, Cloitre M, Hyland P, Shevlin M, Maercker A, Bryant RA, Humayun A, Jones LM, Kagee A, Rousseau C, Somasundaram D, Suzuki Y, Wessely S, van Ommeren M, Reed GM (December 2017). "A review of current evidence regarding the ICD-11 proposals for diagnosing PTSD and complex PTSD". *Clinical Psychology Review*. 58: 1–15

This is manifested biologically by deficits in the frontal cortices of the brain.

Treatment of Aggression, Anger and Emotional Dysregulation in Borderline Personality Disorder - ClinicalTrials.gov. (2007, April 25). Retrieved March 29, 2012, from <http://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/NCT0046703>

## 1. ADD and Emotional Dysregulation

Even though emotional dysregulation is not officially part of the definition of attention deficit disorders, it should be. When a person with attention deficit disorder is trying to cope with the inability to stay focused, having too much energy, and impulsiveness, it is natural they will also have problems regulating their emotions. They get frustrated when they can't complete a task or think before they act and what happens? They explode with frustration.

## 2. Borderline Personality Disorder and Emotional Dysregulation

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a mental health condition thought to stem from negative and highly unpredictable attachment development. This disorder is characterized by emotional dysregulation seen as mood swings, impulsive behavior, and difficult, frequently disrupted relationships with friends, family and co-workers/employers. In extreme cases, it can even lead to self-destructive behavior, including self-harm or suicide.

## 3. PTSD and Emotional Dysregulation

Some life-threatening traumas can include a car accident, surviving a natural disaster or other experiences in which there is a fear of and the expectation of pending death. These are other traumatic events that can be damaging to emotional health and lead to post-traumatic stress disorder. With emotional dysregulation, certain sounds, smells, and even people can trigger avoidance symptoms. These symptoms include having a hard time sleeping, being startled easily, anger outbursts, or being constantly on edge or tense. All of these symptoms make it very difficult to regulate emotions.

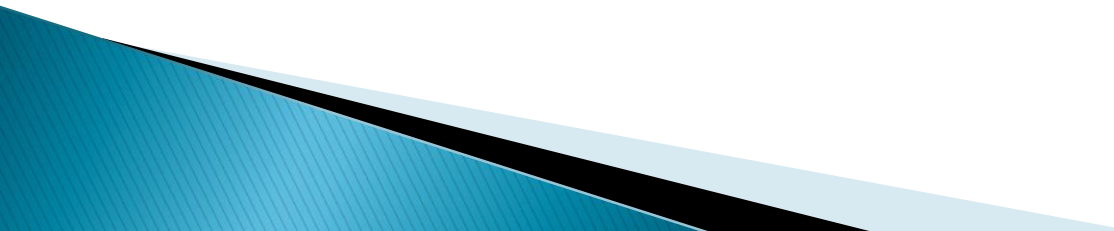
With post-traumatic stress disorder, people may feel a range of emotions all at once, making it hard to distinguish between them, causing over-reaction or acting out in a negative way, such as having a verbal or physical outburst. Clients may feel anxiety, guilt, anger, sadness, fear and even gratitude all at the same time. This makes it difficult at best to focus on appropriate response required at any one time.

<https://vantagepointrecovery.com/causes-emotional-dysregulation/>





# Dysregulated Behavior

- ❖ Aim is to “turn off” intolerable emotions or urges through addictive, self-destructive or impulsive behaviors.
  - ❖ Provide short -term relief or pleasure that cause harm over time.
  - ❖ Becomes a patterned, repeated, embedded response to any stress.
  - ❖ **Behavior that is extremely hard to stop even when a person knows it is causing harm and even when they make sincere efforts to resist or reduce.**
  - ❖ Long histories of being judge and criticized for being “lazy, selfish, weak, character-flawed” for repeating behavior.
  - ❖ Makes building rapport especially challenging and is ripe for countertransference due to worker frustration due to slow progress.
- 

# How we engage with clients acting out

## 3 Important “Truths”

- ▶ Behavior that is extremely hard to stop even when a person knows it is causing harm and even when they make sincere efforts to resist or reduce.
- ▶ Long histories of being judge and criticized for being “lazy, selfish, weak, character-flawed” for repeating behavior.
- ▶ Makes building rapport especially challenging and is ripe for countertransference due to worker frustration due to slow progress.


### Avoid:

- ▶ Shaming clients through negative evaluations of character. Evaluate choices.
- ▶ Surrendering to hopelessness along with client. The client’s ultimate goal may not be supportable or obtainable, but **some** goal is.
- ▶ Increasing helplessness. Clients need to see themselves as directors of their lives, even when the picture looks grim. Provide clients with acknowledgment of their smallest actions even when they are so far from the choices they need to make to have their children back.
- ▶ Many parents cannot engage in change in a time frame that prevents harm to their child... this causes us as providers/professionals to cajole, criticize, threaten, blame, argue. Sometimes decisions of ‘return/not return’ of children is out of clients hands because they re incapable of safe changes to their lives.
- ▶ Personality Disorders or Traits: all the above, remembering external forces (things we do or say or demand) are unlikely to result in personality change. Hold to the rules and requirements they need to follow for a result they say they want.

# Defense Mechanisms

“Defense mechanisms,” or manners in which a person behaves or thinks in certain ways to better protect or “defend” their inner selves (their personality and self-image). Defense mechanisms are one way of looking at how people distance themselves from a full awareness of unpleasant thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Psychologists have categorized defense mechanisms based upon how primitive they are. The more primitive a defense mechanism, the less effective it works for a person over the long-term. However, more primitive defense mechanisms are usually very effective short-term, and hence are favored by many people and children especially (when such primitive defense mechanisms are first learned). Adults who don't learn better ways of coping with stress or traumatic events in their lives will often resort to such primitive defense mechanisms as well.



# Primitive Defense Mechanisms

## ▶ 1. Denial

Denial is the refusal to accept reality or fact, acting as if a painful event, thought or feeling did not exist. It is considered one of the most primitive of the defense mechanisms because it is characteristic of early childhood development. Many people use denial in their everyday lives to avoid dealing with painful feelings or areas of their life they don't wish to admit. For instance, a person who is a functioning alcoholic will often simply deny they have a drinking problem, pointing to how well they function in their job and relationships.

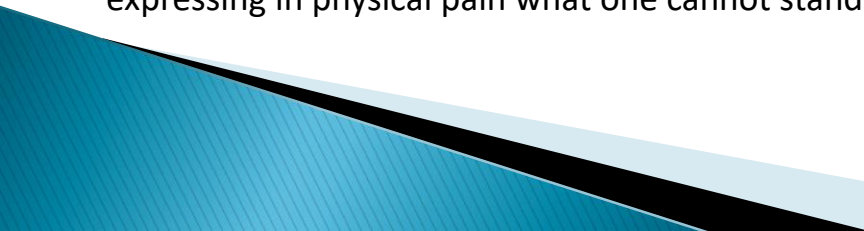
Avoidance and procrastination are types of denial. The first is a simple way of coping by not having to cope. According to the dynamic theory, avoidance is a major defense mechanism in phobias. Procrastination is another form of avoidance where we put off to tomorrow those things that we can avoid today.

## ▶ 2. Regression

Regression is the reversion to an earlier stage of development in the face of unacceptable thoughts or impulses. For an example an adolescent who is overwhelmed with fear, anger and growing sexual impulses might become clingy and start exhibiting earlier childhood behaviors he has long since overcome, such as bedwetting. An adult may regress when under a great deal of stress, refusing to leave their bed and engage in normal, everyday activities.

## ▶ 3. Acting Out

Acting Out is performing an extreme behavior in order to express thoughts or feelings the person feels incapable of otherwise expressing. Instead of saying, "I'm angry with you," a person who acts out may instead throw a book at the person, or punch a hole through a wall. When a person acts out, it can act as a pressure release, and often helps the individual feel calmer and peaceful once again. For instance, a child's temper tantrum is a form of acting out when he or she doesn't get his or her way with a parent. Self-injury may also be a form of acting-out, expressing in physical pain what one cannot stand to feel emotionally.



## More primitive defenses

### ▶ 4. Dissociation

Dissociation is when a person loses track of time and/or person, and instead finds another representation of their self in order to continue in the moment. A person who dissociates often loses track of time or themselves and their usual thought processes and memories. People who have a history of any kind of childhood abuse often suffer from some form of dissociation.

In extreme cases, dissociation can lead to a person believing they have multiple selves (“multiple personality disorder” now known as dissociative identity disorder). People who use dissociation often have a disconnected view of themselves in their world. Time and their own self-image may not flow continuously, as it does for most people. In this manner, a person who dissociates can “disconnect” from the real world for a time, and live in a different world that is not cluttered with thoughts, feelings or memories that are unbearable.

### ▶ 5. Compartmentalization

Compartmentalization is a lesser form of dissociation, wherein parts of oneself are separated from awareness of other parts and behaving as if one had separate sets of values. An example might be an honest person who cheats on their income tax return but is otherwise trustworthy in his financial dealings. In this way, he keeps the two value systems distinct and sees no hypocrisy in doing so, perhaps remaining unconscious of the discrepancy.

## More primitive defenses

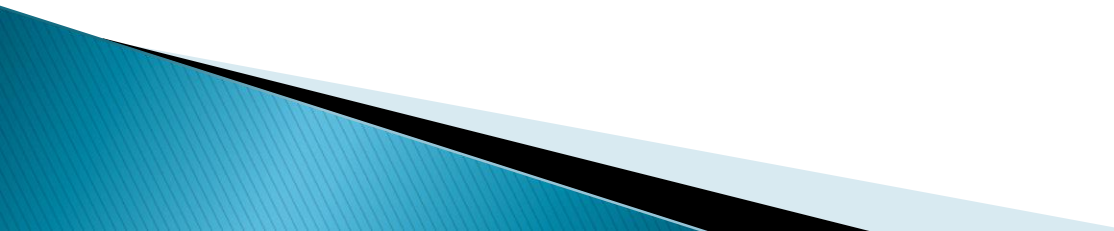
### ▶ 6. Projection

Projection is when you put your feelings or thoughts onto another person, as though they were that person's feelings and thoughts.

Projection is the misattribution of a person's undesired thoughts, feelings, or impulses onto another person who does not have those thoughts, feelings or impulses. Projection is used especially when the thoughts are considered unacceptable for the person to express, or they feel completely ill at ease with having them. For example, a spouse may be angry at their significant other for not listening, when in fact it is the angry spouse who does not listen. Projection is often the result of a lack of insight and acknowledgement of one's own motivations and feelings.

### ▶ 7. Reaction Formation

Reaction Formation is the converting of unwanted or dangerous thoughts, feelings or impulses into their opposites. For instance, a woman who is very angry with her boss and would like to quit her job may instead be overly kind and generous toward her boss and express a desire to keep working there forever. She is incapable of expressing the negative emotions of anger and unhappiness with her job, and instead becomes overly kind to publicly demonstrate her lack of anger and unhappiness.



## Less Primitive, More Mature Defense Mechanisms

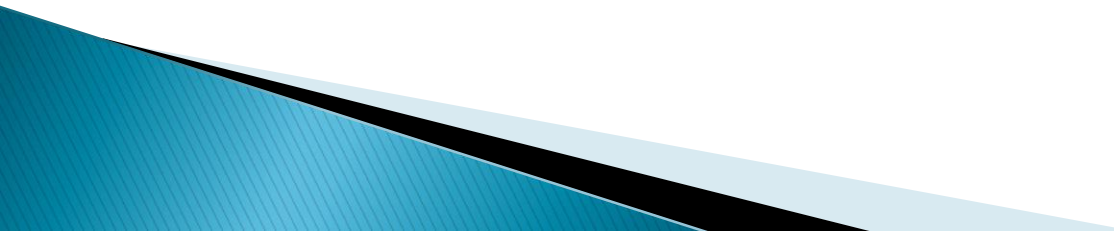
Less primitive defense mechanisms are a step up from the primitive defense mechanisms in the previous section. Many people employ these defenses as adults, and while they work okay for many, they are not ideal ways of dealing with our feelings, stress and anxiety. If you recognize yourself using a few of these, don't feel bad — everybody does.

### 8. Repression.

Repression is the unconscious blocking of unacceptable thoughts, feelings and impulses. The key to repression is that people do it unconsciously, so they often have very little control over it. “Repressed memories” are memories that have been unconsciously blocked from access or view. But because memory is very malleable and ever-changing, it is not like playing back a DVD of your life. The DVD has been filtered and even altered by your life experiences, even by what you've read or viewed.

### 9. Displacement

Displacement is the redirecting of thoughts feelings and impulses directed at one person or object, but taken out upon another person or object. People often use displacement when they cannot express their feelings in a safe manner to the person they are directed at. The classic example is the man who gets angry at his boss, but can't express his anger to his boss for fear of being fired. He instead comes home and kicks the dog or starts an argument with his wife. The man is redirecting his anger from his boss to his dog or wife. Naturally, this is a pretty ineffective defense mechanism, because while the anger finds a route for expression, it's misapplication to other harmless people or objects will cause additional problems for most people.



## Less Primitive, More Mature Defense Mechanisms

### ▶ 10. Intellectualization

When a person intellectualizes, they shut down all of their emotions and approach a situation solely from a rational standpoint — especially when the expression of emotions would be appropriate.

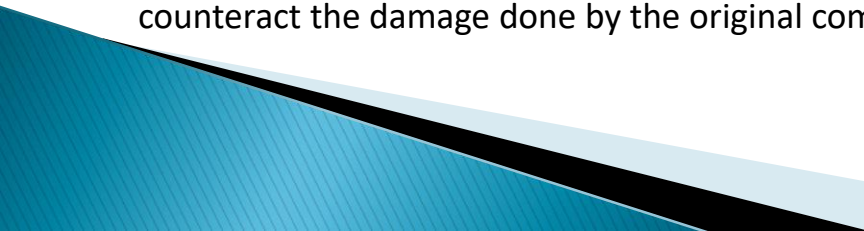
Intellectualization is the overemphasis on thinking when confronted with an unacceptable impulse, situation, or behavior without employing any emotions whatsoever to help mediate and place the thoughts into an emotional, human context. Rather than deal with the painful associated emotions, a person might employ intellectualization to distance themselves from the impulse, event or behavior. For instance, a person who has just been given a terminal medical diagnosis, instead of expressing their sadness and grief, focuses instead on the details of all possible fruitless medical procedures.

### ▶ 11. Rationalization

Rationalization is putting something into a different light or offering a different explanation for one's perceptions or behaviors in the face of a changing reality. For instance, a woman who starts dating a man she really, really likes and thinks the world of is suddenly dumped by the man for no reason. She re-imagines the situation in her mind with the thought, "I suspected he was a loser all along."

### ▶ 12. Undoing

Undoing is the attempt to take back an unconscious behavior or thought that is unacceptable or hurtful. For instance, after realizing you just insulted your significant other unintentionally, you might spend the next hour praising their beauty, charm and intellect. By "undoing" the previous action, the person is attempting to counteract the damage done by the original comment, hoping the two will balance one another out.





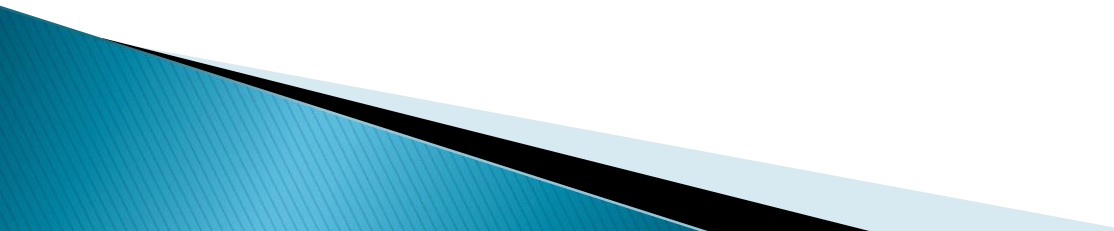
# Mature Defense Mechanisms

Mature defense mechanisms are often the most constructive and helpful to most adults, but may require practice and effort to put into daily use. While primitive defense mechanisms do little to try and resolve underlying issues or problems, mature defenses are more focused on helping a person be a more constructive component of their environment. People with more mature defenses tend to be more at peace with themselves and those around them.

## ▶ 13. Sublimation

Sublimation is simply the channeling of unacceptable impulses, thoughts and emotions into more acceptable ones. For instance, when a person has sexual impulses they would like not to act upon, they may instead focus on rigorous exercise. Refocusing such unacceptable or harmful impulses into productive use helps a person channel energy that otherwise would be lost or used in a manner that might cause the person more anxiety.

Sublimation can also be done with humor or fantasy. Humor, when used as a defense mechanism, is the channeling of unacceptable impulses or thoughts into a light-hearted story or joke. Humor reduces the intensity of a situation, and places a cushion of laughter between the person and the impulses. Fantasy, when used as a defense mechanism, is the channeling of unacceptable or unattainable desires into imagination. For example, imagining one's ultimate career goals can be helpful when one experiences temporary setbacks in academic achievement. Both can help a person look at a situation in a different way, or focus on aspects of the situation not previously explored.



# More Mature Defense Mechanisms

## ▶ 14. Compensation

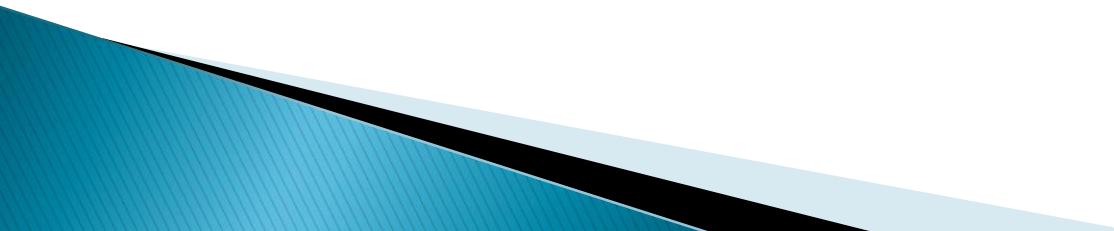
Compensation is a process of psychologically counterbalancing perceived weaknesses by emphasizing strength in other arenas. By emphasizing and focusing on one's strengths, a person is recognizing they cannot be strong at all things and in all areas in their lives. For instance, when a person says, "I may not know how to cook, but I can sure do the dishes!" they're trying to compensate for their lack of cooking skills by emphasizing their cleaning skills instead. When done appropriately and not in an attempt to over-compensate, compensation is defense mechanism that helps reinforce a person's self-esteem and self-image.

## ▶ 15. Assertiveness

You can be clear and assertive in your communication, without needing to be aggressive and blunt.

Assertiveness is the emphasis of a person's needs or thoughts in a manner that is respectful, direct and firm. Communication styles exist on a continuum, ranging from passive to aggressive, with assertiveness falling neatly in-between. People who are passive and communicate in a passive manner tend to be good listeners, but rarely speak up for themselves or their own needs in a relationship.

People who are aggressive and communicate in an aggressive manner tend to be good leaders, but often at the expense of being able to listen with empathy to others and their ideas and needs. People who are assertive strike a balance where they speak up for themselves, express their opinions or needs in a respectful yet firm manner, and listen when they are being spoken to. Becoming more assertive is one of the most desired communication skills and helpful defense mechanisms most people want to learn, and would benefit in doing so.



# References

Grohol, J. (2019). 15 Common Defense Mechanisms. Psych Central. Retrieved on June 19, 2019, from <https://psychcentral.com/lib/15-common-defense-mechanisms/>

Vantage Point Recovery: <https://vantagepointrecovery.com/causes-emotional-dysregulation/>

Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional\\_dysregulation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_dysregulation)

Wupperman, P. (2019). *Treating impulsive, addictive , and self-destructive behaviors*. New York: Guilford Press